

**UNFULFILLED DESIRES OF THE MAIN CHARACTER IN
GAIL HONEYMAN'S *ELEANOR OLIPHANT IS COMPLETELY
FINE***

THESIS

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FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
UNIVERSITAS ISLAM NEGERI MAULANA MALIK
IBRAHIM MALANG**

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THESIS

Presented to

Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang in Partial Fulfillment of
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**UNIVERSITAS ISLAM NEGERI MAULANA MALIK IBRAHIM
MALANG**

2026

STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

I state that thesis entitled **“Unfulfilled Desires of the Main Character in Gail Honeyman’s Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine”** is my original work. I do not include any materials previously written or published by another person, except those cited as references and written in the bibliography. Hereby, if there is any objection or claim, I am the only person who is responsible for that.

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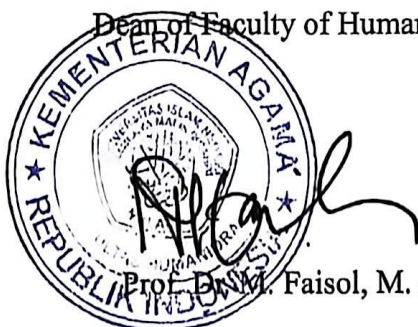


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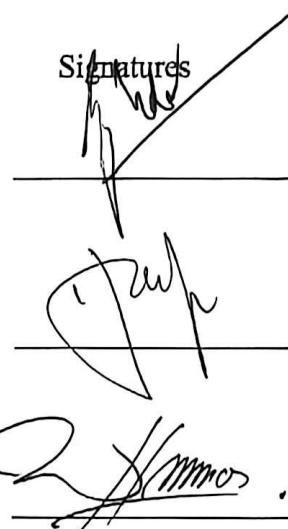
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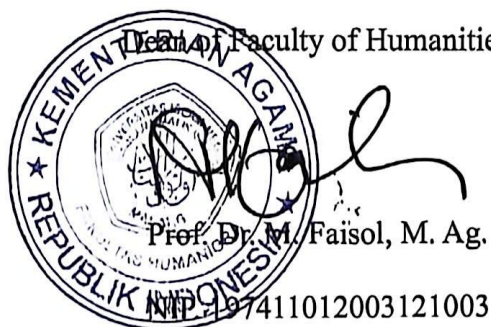
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MOTTO

“Treat people with kindness.” – Harry Styles

“But never let it silence your own voice, nor diminish your own light.”

DEDICATION

I whole heartedly dedicate this thesis to my beloved parents. My Graceful Mother and Stalwart Father. The one that endless love, prayers, and sacrifices have been my ultimate strength. I would love to thank my Marvelous Brother, Radiant Little Broski, and Sweet Pea Baby Sis. Thank you for being the constant joy and light in my journey. I could not do any of this without my Kids Friendly group friends. The warmest home where I can always return and truly be myself.

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brother who inspires me to actively strive in achieving things in life. And my little sister's Malikha who is always adorable. Her spirit brings joy and brights my days.

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pulling through assignments, eating together, and hanging out. Thank you for always proactively reaching out to help me even before I could find the strength to ask. And for constantly reassure me that I am never alone in Malang. I am incredibly grateful to be able meet and grow with you in this journey. I truly hope our bond of friendship can continue to be maintained for a very long time. Even after graduation when we eventually move forward pursue our own lives.

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Finally, I realized that this thesis is still far from perfect. Therefore, with an open heart, I accept all constructive criticism and suggestions for future improvements. Hopefully this research can provide benefits and make a small contribution to the development of knowledge. Especially in the field of literature.

Malang, 5 June 2026

The Researcher,



Bilqis Nafisyah Atjim Roa

ABSTRACT

Roa, Bilqis Nafisyah Atjim (2026). *Unfulfilled Desires of the Main Character in Gail Honeyman's Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine*. Undergraduate Thesis. Department of English Literature, Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. Advisor, Hafidhun Annas, M.Hum.

Keywords: *unfulfilled desires, illusion, wholeness, self-perception, Lacanian psychoanalysis*

This study examines the unfulfilled desires of the main character in Gail Honeyman's novel *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine* through the framework of Jacques Lacan's psychoanalysis. The phenomenon of emotional loneliness in modern life is often experienced by individuals who appear to be socially functioning, but harbor a deep inner emptiness. It is a condition that psychologically rooted in desires that are never truly fulfilled. The novel represents this phenomenon through Eleanor Oliphant character. She is a woman who lives in extreme isolation. She also builds an illusion of wholeness behind her regular routine. This study aims to answer two main questions. What unfulfilled desires shape Eleanor's self-perception through her relationships with others. And how these desires reveal the illusion of wholeness in Eleanor's life. The method used is literary criticism with a literary psychology approach. It is applying Lacanian concepts such as *lack*, desire, the Other, *objet petit a*, *split subject*, and fantasy as a tool for the analysis. The results show that Eleanor's self-perception was shaped by four unfulfilled desires. First is the desire for the mother's approval. Second is the desire for normality. Next is the desire for love. And last is the desire for absolution. These four desires stem from her mother's dominance as the Other which instills a deep sense of inadequacy from Eleanor's childhood. The illusion of wholeness that Eleanor builds collapse through three stages. The deconstruction of the completely fine fantasy, the detachment from the authority of the Other, and the acceptance of herself as a divided subject. The study concludes that Eleanor's journey is about learning to live honestly with her fragmentation. It also about the illusion of wholeness itself collapses as a form of liberation.

مستخلص البث

روا، بلقيس نفيسية أنجم (2026). رغبات الشخصية الرئيسية في فيلم إيلينور أوليفانت التي تؤديها جيل هونيمان غير محققة هي أمر مقبول تماما. أطروحة البكالوريوس. قسم الأدب الإنجليزي، كلية العلوم الإنسانية، جامعة الإسلام المولانا مالك إبراهيم مالانغ. المستشار: حافظ أنس، ماجستير في الهم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الرغبات غير المليية، الوهم، الكمال، الإدراك الذاتي، التحليل النفسي اللاكاني

تفحص هذه الدراسة الرغبات غير الملباة للشخصية الرئيسية في رواية جيل هونيمان "إيلينور أوليفانت بخير تماما" من خلال إطار التحليل النفسي لجاك لاكان. ظاهرة الوحدة العاطفية في الحياة الحديثة غالبا ما يختبرها أفراد يبدون وكأنهم يؤدون وظائفهم الاجتماعية، لكنهم يحملون فراغا داخليا عميقا. إنها حالة متجذرة نفسيا في رغبات لا تتحقق حقا. تمثل الرواية هذه الظاهرة من خلال شخصية إيلينور أوليفانت، امرأة تعيش في عزلة شديدة. كما أنها تبني وهما بالكمال خلف روتين يبدو منتظما. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى الإجابة على سؤالين رئيسيين. ما هي الرغبات غير المحققة التي تشكل تصور إيلينور الذاتي من خلال علاقاتها مع الآخرين، وكيف تكشف هذه الرغبات عن وهم الكمال في حياة إيلينور. الطريقة المستخدمة هي النقد الأدبي مع نهج علم النفس الأدبي، حيث يطبق مفاهيم لاكانية مثل *النقص*، *الرغبة*، *والآخر*، *والمادة الصغيرة جدا*، *والموضوع المنقسم*، *والخيال كاداة للتحليل*. أظهرت النتائج أن تصور إيلينور الذاتي كان يتشكل من خلال أربعة رغبات غير محققة. الرغبة في موافقة الأم، الرغبة في الحياة الطبيعية، الرغبة في الحب، والرغبة في الغفران. تتبع هذه الرغبات الأربع من سيطرة والدتها كالأخرى، مما يزرع إحساسا عميقا بالنقص في طفولة إيلينور. ينهار وهم الكمال الذي تبنيه إيلينور عبر ثلاث مراحل. تفكيك الخيال الجميل تماما، والانفصال عن سلطة الآخر، وقبول نفسها كموضوع منقسم. تستنتج الدراسة أن رحلة إيلينور تدور حول تعلم العيش بصدق مع تجزئتها. كما أنه يتعلق بوهم الكمال نفسه الذي ينهار كشكل من أشكال التحرر.

ABSTRAK

Roa, Bilqis Nafisyah Atjim (2026). “Keinginan yang tidak terpenuhi dari karakter utama dalam Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine karya Gail Honeyman”. Skripsi Sarjana. Program Studi Sastra Inggris, Fakultas Humaniora, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. Dosen Pembimbing: Hafidhun Annas, M.Hum.

Kata Kunci: *hasrat yang tidak terpenuhi, ilusi, keutuhan, persepsi diri, psikoanalisis lacanian*

Studi ini meneliti hasrat karakter utama yang tidak terpenuhi dalam novel *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine* karya Gail Honeyman. Penelitian ini dilakukan melalui kerangka psikoanalisis Jacques Lacan. Fenomena kesepian emosional dalam kehidupan modern sering dialami oleh individu yang tampak berfungsi secara sosial. Namun, menyimpan kekosongan batin yang mendalam. Ini adalah kondisi psikologis yang berakar pada hasrat tidak terpenuhi. Novel ini mewakili fenomena ini melalui karakter Eleanor Oliphant. Ia adalah seorang wanita yang hidup dengan mengisolasi dirinya sendiri dengan ekstrem. Dia juga membangun ilusi keutuhan di balik rutinitasnya. Studi ini bertujuan untuk menjawab dua pertanyaan utama. Hasrat yang tidak terpenuhi membentuk persepsi diri Eleanor melalui hubungannya dengan orang lain. Dan bagaimana hasrat tidak terpenuhi ini mengungkap ilusi keutuhan dalam kehidupan Eleanor. Metode yang digunakan pada studi ini adalah kritik sastra dengan pendekatan psikologi sastra. Ini menerapkan konsep Lacanian seperti kekurangan, hasrat, sang objek, objek kecil, subjek terpisah, dan fantasi sebagai alat untuk menganalisis. Hasil studi ini menunjukkan bahwa persepsi diri Eleanor dibentuk oleh empat hasrat tidak terpenuhi. Pertama adalah hasrat untuk diakui ibunya. Kedua adalah hasrat akan normalitas. Berikutnya adalah hasrat untuk cinta. Dan yang terakhir adalah hasrat untuk diampuni. Keempat keinginan ini berasal dari dominasi ibunya sebagai objek besar yang menanamkan rasa ketidakmampuan mendalam dari masa kecil Eleanor. Ilusi keutuhan yang dibangun Eleanor runtuh melalui tiga tahap. Dekonstruksi fantasi yang benar-benar bagus, detasemen dari otoritas objek besar, dan penerimaan dirinya sebagai subjek yang terbagi. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa perjalanan Eleanor adalah tentang belajar hidup jujur dengan fragmentasinya. Ini juga tentang ilusi keutuhan itu sendiri runtuh sebagai bentuk pembebasan.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the research background, research problems, research significance, scope and limitations, and definitions of key terms.

A. Background of the Study

In contemporary society, the phenomenon of modern loneliness is increasingly associated with individuals who appear to function socially, but emotionally experience disconnection and inner emptiness (Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2018). This condition is not purely caused by a lack of social interaction, but by the individual's inability to fulfill their emotional desires for closeness, recognition, and meaningful connection (Grigorian et al., 2024; Pardede & Kovač, 2023; Zhou et al., 2024). The phenomenon is often manifested as emotional loneliness, which is the subjective experience of someone who interacts socially but feels misunderstood and emotionally disconnected (Wolters et al., 2023).

Further empirical studies show that emotional loneliness is significantly associated with a reduced sense of meaning in life and psychological well-being (Macià et al., 2021; Özdoğan, 2021; Afrashteh et al., 2024). This association indicates that emotional loneliness directly affects how individuals make sense of their lives, shape their sense of purpose, and perceive their own existence. Therefore, emotional loneliness in modern life can be understood

not only as a relational issue, but also as a condition that opens space for analyzing unfulfilled desires and the ongoing pursuit of meaning and wholeness (Ratcliffe, 2020).

Humans are naturally shaped by desire, an internal force that drives them to seek satisfaction, emotional connection, and form their identity. Desire is often understood as a spontaneous psychological process that arises independently of rational consideration or full consciousness (Tooming, 2019). Unlike basic needs such as food, sleep, and shelter, desire is understood as a motivational drive related to the search for satisfaction, meaning, and emotional connection that is not aim for final fulfilment (Kringelbach & Berridge, 2017). Desire is rooted in a persistent feeling of lack, so it is never completely satisfied.

This condition keeps individuals in a continuous search for meaning, recognition, and emotional satisfaction, which eventually influences their life orientation and the formation of personal identity (Martela & Steger, 2023). When desire is unfulfilled, individuals often experience psychological tension manifested as frustration, anxiety, and feelings of emotional incompleteness (Van den Broeck et al., 2016). This situation shows that desire functions as an ongoing emotional process in everyday experiences, which affects psychological well-being and how individuals value themselves (Mariqueo-Russell, 2023). This phenomenon is widely represented in literary works, particularly in contemporary novels, where characters are depicted as living in tension due to unfulfilled desires. In this context, desire is not simply a trigger

for the characters' actions, but acts as a psychological structure that shapes inner conflict, social relationships, and the often-unattainable search for a sense of wholeness (He et al., 2023).

The phenomenon of emotional loneliness as part of modern loneliness can be studied through the psychology of literature approach, which focuses on the representation of human psychological experiences through characters in literary works. The psychology of literature emphasizes the analysis of emotional conditions, inner conflicts, and internal drives of characters as reflected in the narrative and behavior of the characters (Wellek & Warren, 1956). In this study, emotional loneliness is understood through the concept of desire as an unfulfilled psychological drive that creates emotional tension in characters (Tooming, 2019). This phenomenon is represented through the main character in the novel *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine*. Therefore, the scope of this research is limited to the psychological analysis of the main character.

The novel *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine* by Gail Honeyman follows the daily life of Eleanor Oliphant, a woman who lives alone and works in an office in Glasgow. Eleanor leads a highly structured routine, spending her weekdays at work, eating the same meals, and spending her weekends by herself. Her life changes when she becomes involved in an unexpected friendship that introduces new social interactions into her routine. As the narrative progresses, the novel gradually reveals events from Eleanor's past, particularly her childhood experiences, which are presented alongside her

present-day life. Through Eleanor's point of view, the novel depicts her interactions with others and the events that shape her personal story (Honeyman, 2017).

Among the theories that can be applied within the field of the psychology of literature is Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory of desire. Lacan (2018) views humans as subjects who live in a state of lack, whereby desire emerges as a drive that stems from an inner emptiness that can never be completely filled. Desire moves continuously, shifting from one object to another, because what is wanted is not the object itself, but rather the experience of wholeness, which is structurally always beyond the subject's reach (Fink, 1995). This view also places language and the symbolic order as important elements in the formation of the subject, so that desire is always related to the recognition and view of the Other (Evans, 2006). As a result, the subject is in tension between self-awareness and unconscious desire that continues to drive the self-fulfillment. In this research, Lacanian's concept of desire is used to interpret the psychological tension of characters arising from experiences of emotional loneliness and unfulfilled desires.

This concept can be associated with the main character in *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine*. Eleanor is portrayed as a figure who struggles with loneliness and the need to feel whole, even though her life appears orderly and fine on the surface. Through the Lacanian perspective, Eleanor's struggle to find happiness and social connection can be understood as a search for an object of desire that she can never truly achieve (Wang & Jia, 2021). Thus,

Lacanian desire theory helps explain how inner emptiness and unfulfilled desires shape the behavior and psychological identity of the main character in the novel.

Some previous studies of psychological research of *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine* in the last five years have generally focused on issues of identity, trauma, and the main character's recovery process in the context of contemporary life (Hussain et al., 2023; Macmillan, 2021). On the other hand, psychological research shows that emotional loneliness is a psychological phenomenon characterized by emotional disconnection, inner emptiness, and a reduced sense of meaning in life, even though individuals continue to function socially (Özdoğan, 2021; Wolters et al., 2023). In literary studies, the Lacanian psychoanalytic approach is widely used to analyze how desire, lack, and subjectivity shape the inner conflicts and psychological tensions of characters in various literary works (Jasim & Benny, 2025; Krsmanović, 2023; Sarfraz & Faheem, 2025; Sheikh, 2025).

Moreover, contemporary theoretical research outside of literary studies positions Lacanian desire as a structural condition rooted in lack and playing a crucial role in the formation of human subjectivity in general (Aydin & Possati, 2025; Vulović & Ejodus, 2024). These studies show that research on the psychological experiences of literary characters, particularly those related to emotional loneliness and desire, is still relevant to be developed further in understanding the complexity of the subjective experiences of characters in literary narratives.

According to the descriptions above, it shows that exploration on how unfulfilled desires shape the psychological experience of the main character in *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine*, particularly in relation to the formation of self-perception, social relationships, and the search for a sense of wholeness has never been done. So far, studies of the novel have mostly emphasized aspects of trauma, identity, and the healing process, while the role of unfulfilled desires as a structural force that shapes the character's subjectivity has not been discussed in detail through the Lacanian psychoanalytic framework. By further understanding the dynamics of unfulfilled desires in Eleanor's experience, this research aims to provide a deeper understanding of the psychological tensions experienced by the character and how she constructs her sense of self through her relationships with others.

Furthermore, the exploration of unfulfilled desires in the context of emotional loneliness also has important implications for literary studies and literary psychology. This research can enrich our understanding of how the illusion of wholeness works in literary narratives. It also a way of how the tension between desire, deficiency, and social relations shapes character development. In a broader context, this research is expected to contribute to the development of the psychology of literature approach. It is particularly in understanding the representation of emotional loneliness and the search for subjective meaning in contemporary literary works.

The novel *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine* was chosen as the object of research because it represents a contemporary phenomenon, namely modern

loneliness. Eleanor as the main character reflects this condition. Although she works, interacts with others, and lives a structured life, she internally experiences trauma and loneliness. However, this research goes beyond trauma and loneliness as psychological experiences. It examines unfulfilled desire as something that continuously happens inside Eleanor, not only as a temporary experience, but as an ongoing psychological process that is also relevant to current society in real world.

Eleanor does not consciously acknowledge her loneliness, but her behavior, way of thinking, and the fantasies she constructs reveal unfulfilled emotional desires. This uniqueness makes the novel relevant for analysis through a psychoanalytic approach, particularly Jacques Lacan's theory of desire, which views desire as a drive rooted in lack and never fully satisfied, align with the condition of Eleanor in the novel. Furthermore, the narrative perspective that foregrounds the character's internal experiences allows for an in-depth examination of Eleanor's inner dynamics, as narrative theory emphasizes the focus and representation of consciousness in shaping the reader's access to the character's psychological world (Dawson & Mäkelä, 2023). So that this novel provides a rich space for analysis to examine how unfulfilled desires shape the main character's self-perception and social relationships.

This research is based on the assumption that literary works, especially novels, can be analyzed through a psychoanalytic approach because literary texts represent human psychological experiences through characters and

narratives. The next assumption is that the novel *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine* presents a main character who experiences unfulfilled desires, which is reflected through emotional loneliness, repetitive behavior patterns, and fantasies about an ideal life. The final assumption is that the application of Lacanian psychoanalysis is able to reveal the dynamics of these unfulfilled desires, including how they shape the character's perception of herself and expose the illusion of wholeness that she maintains in her life.

The purpose of this research is to obtain an in-depth explanation of the unfulfilled desires experienced by the main character in *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine*. Specifically, this study aims to identify what unfulfilled desires that shape the main character's self-perception through her relationships with others, and to analyze how these unfulfilled desires reveal the illusion of wholeness in the main character's life.

B. Problems of the Study

Based on the background of the study, the study focuses on answering two key questions:

1. What unfulfilled desires shape the main character's self-perception through her relationships with others in *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine* by Gail Honeyman?
2. How do the main character's unfulfilled desires expose the illusion of wholeness in *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine* by Gail Honeyman?

C. Significance of the Study

This study has both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, by applying Lacanian psychoanalysis—particularly the concepts of desire, lack, *objet petit a*, and *the Other*—this research provides a deeper understanding of how unfulfilled desires shape Eleanor Oliphant’s perception of herself and her relationships with others. It also examines how these desires sustain the illusion of wholeness that Eleanor constructs to cope with her emotional emptiness. While previous research on *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine* has mainly explored trauma, loneliness, or defense mechanisms, few have analyzed how Lacanian desire explains the tension between the feeling of lack and the illusion of being “fine.” Therefore, this study fills that gap by showing how Eleanor’s unfulfilled desires influence her emotional perception and interactions with others.

Practically, this study offers insight into the subtle dynamics of human desire and emotional well-being. It shows how individuals who seem emotionally stable may, in fact, struggle with feelings of incompleteness and loneliness that shape their thoughts and relationships. Through Eleanor’s experience, readers and mental health practitioners can better understand how the illusion of wholeness functions as a psychological defense against unfulfilled desires. In today’s society, where many people hide emotional emptiness behind appearances of normalcy, this study highlights the importance of recognizing inner desires and emotional honesty as essential aspects of psychological growth.

D. Scope and Limitation

This study only focuses on the psychological dimensions of the main character, Eleanor Oliphant, in *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine* by Gail Honeyman. Specifically, it examines the forms of Eleanor's unfulfilled desires that shape her perception of herself and her relationships with others, and how these desires expose the illusion of wholeness she strives for. The analysis applies Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, emphasizing the key concepts of lack, desire, the Other, and *objet petit a* to examine the dynamics of Eleanor's inner conflict and emotional development.

However, this study has several limitations. First, it is restricted to the analysis of the novel as a literary text and does not involve any real psychological or clinical evaluation. Second, the discussion centers solely on the main character, without detailed examination of secondary characters or the broader social structures depicted in the story. Third, since the study relies on Lacanian theory, the analysis emphasizes the symbolic and unconscious aspects of desire, meaning the interpretations are confined to textual evidence and theoretical readings rather than absolute psychological truths. Despite these limitations, this study aims to provide a focused and theoretically grounded understanding of how unfulfilled desires function as a catalyst in Eleanor's psychological journey toward a sense of wholeness, offering insight into the subtle dynamics of desire and self-perception in contemporary literature.

E. The Definition of Key Terms

1. Unfulfilled Desires

Desire, in Lacanian perspective, is not merely a physical need or a need that can be fulfilled directly, but rather an inner drive that always arises from a sense of internal deficiency and interaction with others (Lacan, 2014). This desire is continuous and never fully satisfied, thereby influencing an individual's motivation, decisions, and identity formation (Maleki Qouzloo & Sadjadi, 2021).

2. Wholeness

According to Lacan, wholeness is merely an illusion that arises in the mirror stage, where individuals identify themselves with their ideal self-image (Lacan, 2014). However, this experience is disrupted when individuals enter the symbolic order through language and society, causing a feeling of loss of wholeness (Yan, 2024).

3. Illusion of Wholeness

The illusion of wholeness is the subject's psychic belief that there is a condition in which the lack can be closed and his being can be fully realized. Lacan calls it the horizon of being. It is the point at which the subject imagines it as the place where desire is finally (Lacan, 2014). But because the lack is structural and permanent, the horizon is never really reached. It is just an illusion that the subject maintains through fantasy in order for desire to keep moving.

4. Self- Perception

Refers to how individuals understand themselves and their connections with others as shaped by social interactions and internal experiences. According to Mead et al. (2015), the perception of self develops through interaction with the Other, where one's awareness of identity and relationship patterns reflects both personal and social dimensions of the self.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW ON RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter elaborates the approach of Psychology of Literature and Lacanian Psychoanalysis as the main theoretical framework.

A. Psychology of Literature

Psychology of literature is a branch of knowledge that examines the relationship between literature and psychology, from the perspective of the author, the work, and the reader. According to Wellek and Warren (2014), psychology of literature can be divided into four main approaches: the study of the author as an individual, the study of the creative process, the study of psychological principles in literary works, and the study of the impact of literature on readers. These approaches allow for a deeper understanding of literary works as complex representations of the psychological conditions of individuals and society.

In the context of analyzing *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine*, a psychology of literature approach is relevant because the narrative foregrounds the protagonist's inner experiences, internal conflicts, and search for identity. The psychological approach allows researcher to examine the psychological dynamics of fictional characters without intending to make clinical diagnoses, but rather to understand how mental and emotional conditions are represented in literary narratives. One of the psychological approaches widely used in literary studies is psychoanalysis, which offers a theoretical framework for

examining aspects of the unconscious, inner conflict, and the formation of subjectivity in literary works.

Psychology of literature also considers fictional characters as the center of psychological study. Research in narrative psychology and aesthetics shows that fictional characters are considered central elements in works of fiction because of their involvement in emotional dynamics, psychological experiences, and interpretive processes of readers, which enables psychological analysis of characters' motivations, inner conflicts, and personality structures (Maslej et al., 2017). Similarly, Tyson (2014) states that characters in literary works often serve as representations of internal conflicts, emotional tensions, and complex social dynamics. Through these characters, readers can understand how psychological experiences are symbolically constructed in literary texts. Therefore, psychological analysis of characters is important for revealing the deeper meaning of actions, relationships, and character development in a narrative.

The development of modern psychology of literature studies shows that the psychological experiences of characters and readers' responses to literary works are interrelated. Through this approach, readers not only follow the storyline, but also become emotionally involved with the conflicts and inner conditions of the characters represented in the literary text. The psychology of literature facilitates a deeper understanding of the mental and emotional conditions constructed in the narrative, allowing literary works to be read as

representations of complex psychological experiences (Anas et al., 2019; Berry & Brown, 2019).

Therefore, psychology of literature provides a theoretical framework for understanding the inner dynamics of characters, internal conflicts, and the process of identity formation in literary works. This approach opens up the possibility of implementing a more specific psychoanalytic framework to examine the subjectivity of characters and the psychological conflict structures that underlie them. The following discussion will therefore focus on Jacques Lacan's psychoanalysis as the main theoretical framework for this study.

B. Lacanian Psychoanalysis

In the development of modern psychoanalysis, Jacques Lacan offers a reinterpretation of humans as subjects who are fundamentally shaped by language and social relations. Departing from Freud's idea of the unconscious, Lacan asserts that subjectivity is not formed from within the individual, but rather appears through external structures such as language, symbols, and relationships with others (Evans, 2006). This perspective is relevant in literary studies because it allows the analysis of fictional characters not only based on their actions, but also through the psychological dynamics that underlie the characters' speech, trauma, and subjective experiences (Heidarizadeh, 2015). Therefore, Lacan's psychoanalysis provides an appropriate theoretical framework for examining the formation of desire and subjectivity in literary narratives.

According to Lacan (2018), human subjects are fundamentally in a state of division (split subject), because it is impossible to achieve absolute wholeness. When individuals enter the symbolic order, which includes language, social norms, and systems of meaning, they experience a fundamental loss that shapes the way they understand themselves and their existence (Fink, 1995). As a result, identity is not fixed or stable, but is constantly negotiated through relations with the symbolic order and with others. This condition creates a continuous tension between the self as represented and the self as experienced internally (Evans, 2006).

The following discussion outlines the main concepts in Lacanian psychoanalysis that function as analytical tools in this research.

1. Desire

Lacan distinguishes three structures of drive, including need, demand, and desire. Need refers to biological needs that can be fulfilled concretely. While demand is a request mediated by language and contains demands for recognition or love. Desire arises from the gap between need and demand and can never be fully satisfied (Lacan, 2018). In *Seminar VI*, Lacan states that desire is the difference produced by the reduction of need from demand (Lacan, 2018, p. 163).

In *Seminar VI: Desire and Its Interpretation* (1958–1959), Jacques Lacan opened with one simple question that turned out to be not easy to

answer: what exactly is desire. Lacan is not satisfied with the prevailing answer that desire is a desire that will be completed once the object is obtained. For him, desire works in a much more complicated way than that, and to explain it, he distinguishes desire from two concepts that are often considered similar, namely *need* and *demand*.

Need is the earliest and simplest point. Lacan refers to biological needs such as hunger, thirst, and fatigue that can basically be fulfilled directly. When a person is hungry and eats, his needs are fulfilled. *Need* to work at the body level, and the body can be satisfied. However, humans do not live only at the level of the body. Once that need has to be conveyed to others, it has to go through language, and that's where things change. Lacan noted that even before a child can speak, this process is already underway. A baby's cry is already a call to someone, already brings a kind of demand to another. When the need passes language and is addressed to a person, it becomes *a demand*.

What makes demand different is because whenever someone asks someone else for something, the request unconsciously brings something more than just its object. Behind concrete requests there is always something deeper. It is a call for presence, care, and recognition from the intended person. A crying child is also asking for his mother to attend. In this sense demand always goes beyond the object requested because it is a call for love and recognition.

This is where desire is born, right in the gap that remains after *demand* is answered. Lacan called it *an interval*, that is, the distance between what is produced by *demand* and the recognition that the subject is actually seeking. He writes that desire manifests in this interval, this gap (Lacan, 2014). That gap can never be closed by any object. It is because what is really sought is a sense of wholeness, a sense of being fully acknowledged, a sense of no longer lacking.

From this understanding, the difference between fulfilled and satisfied is important to emphasize. A desire can be fulfilled in the sense that the object has been achieved. But desire is never satisfied. It is because true satisfaction requires the closing of the gap. While the gap is structural and is not born from the lack of a particular object but from the condition of the subject who lives in language. Lacan calls desire the metonymy of being. Just as metonymy in language keeps shifting meaning from one word to another without an endpoint. Desire keeps moving from one object to the next. When the desire is finally obtained and the feeling of fullness does not come, the desire does not disappear. It shifts, looking for a new object that seems to promise the same fullness. Because how desire works structurally is maintained precisely by its inability to actually arrive.

In this research, desire is understood as a continuous movement driven by lack, which shapes the way subjects view themselves and relate to others. Therefore, the concept of desire is used to analyze how unfulfilled

desires shape the main character's self-perception and social relations, as asked in Research Question 1.

2. The Other (Autre)

In Lacanian psychoanalysis, the Other (Autre) refers to the symbolic order that includes language, norms, and social recognition systems (Lacan, 2018). The Other is not simply another individual, but a symbolic field where meaning and validation are produced. Therefore, the subject's desire is always mediated by the Other, so Lacan states that desire is the desire of the Other (Fink, 1995).

Within the framework of Lacan's theory, the Other does not simply refer to the other literally. The Other is the place where language, law, and meaning are sourced. It is a kind of symbolic power greater than any individual, yet one that first comes to a child in the concrete form of a caregiver figure. Lacan affirms that a subject's desire does not grow from within himself. Desire was first encountered as something that came from outside, namely from the Other. As he writes in Seminar VI, desire is first of all apprehended as being that of the desire of the other, which the subject has to situate his own desire (Lacan, 2014). This means that before a subject knows what he wants, he first learns to read the wishes of others around him.

This process occurs most early in the relationship between the child and his mother. Lacan explained that a mother is not only a milkgiver (*sein*), but also a sign-giver (*seing*), which is a symbolic gesture that teaches children that someone can be present and can go, can give and can withhold. The game of *cilukba* that the mother performs, for example, hiding her face and then reappearing, is already a symbolic act that instills a fundamental lesson: the presence of another person can never be fully guaranteed. It is from this experience that the child begins to form his desires, not on the basis of biological impulses, but on the basis of the questions that continue to haunt him: what does the Other want from me, and whether I am enough to make it exist.

Because desire is formed through this kind of relationship, the way a subject sees himself is never purely from within. Lacan explains that the ego is formed precisely in response to the Other. It is as a way for the subject to defend himself from a sense of helplessness in the face of the desires of others that he cannot always read or control. The subject constructs a picture of himself based on how he imagines the Other perceiving him. When the recognition of the Other is given consistently and fully, that self-image grows quite steadily. But when the recognition is absent, erratic, or destructive, the subject loses his footing to understand who he is. Self-perception becomes something fragile and continues to depend on signals from the outside. Because it is from the outside that desire is first formed.

As an analytical tool, the concept of the Other allows this study to examine how the characters' desires are shaped by social expectations, the need for recognition, and symbolic relations, which contribute to the formation of interpersonal relations as discussed in Research Question 1.

3. Objet Petit a

Lacan introduced the *objet petit a* as the object-cause of desire, something that is imagined to be capable of restoring the subject's wholeness, but in reality is never truly attainable (Lacan, 2018). The *objet petit a* is not a concrete object, but rather a symbolic or imaginary construction that sustains desire by promising fulfillment. Žižek (2008) explains that the unattainability of the *objet petit a* actually keeps desire alive.

In this research, the *objet petit a* is used to trace the direction of the characters' desires and explain why fulfillment is always delayed, thereby supporting the analysis of unfulfilled desires in Research Question 1.

4. Lack (Manque)

If desire is formed through a relationship with the Other, then what happens when that relationship is never really enough? This is where the concept of lack comes into play. Lacan explained that once a subject enters the language and the symbolic world, there is something structurally that can never be fulfilled. Language can never capture the experience in its

entirety. There is always a distance between what is meant to be said and what is actually conveyed. From that gap is born. Lacan writes that in every subject's relationship with the Other as a place of language, there is a subject which is always lacking (Lacan, 2014). Lack is not a condition that can be cured or overcome. It is part of the structure of the subject itself, an inevitable consequence of living in language.

Because the lack is structural, the subject cannot actually fill it. What the subject can do is build a fantasy. It is an imaginary scenario in which the lack seems to be closed and the fullness seems to be achievable. Lacan emphasized that human desire is not actually directed to objects, but to fantasies (Lacan, 2014). Fantasy is not just a daydream or an empty dream. It is the psychic structure that sustains the subject. Which gives it reason to continue wanting something by convincing it that fullness is possible, that there is one object or one condition which will make everything feel complete when it achieved.

Yet fullness itself never really exists. It is an illusion, a retroactive projection formed by the subject as if there were a whole state that he once had or that he would one day achieve. Lacan explains that the subject's being is always at a certain distance from himself, and therefore the subject cannot help but pursue his being through a constantly moving desire. Fullness always seemed like something close to being achieved, always being one step ahead, yet never really coming. This is what the illusion of wholeness

is all about: not something that is perceived as an illusion by the subject who experiences it, but something that he constantly believes in and pursues precisely because he does not realize that fullness is structurally impossible.

This theoretical framework is the basis for reading the character of Eleanor Oliphant in the novel *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine* by Gail Honeyman. Eleanor is a subject who grows up without a stable recognition of the Other, and that absence shapes the way she perceives herself as well as the way she constructs and pursues her desires. The unfulfilled desires in his life are not merely the result of external circumstances, but are a reflection of the psychic structure formed from flawed relationships from the beginning. Through the concepts of need, demand, desire, the Other, lack, and the illusion of wholeness described above, this analysis will trace how Eleanor's unfulfilled desires shape her self-perception and uncover the illusion of fullness that she maintains throughout the narrative.

In Lacan's theory, the concept of lack (*manque*) is a structural condition experienced by the subject when entering the symbolic order (Lacan, 2018). This lack does not refer to material absence, but rather to an existential feeling that there is always a part of oneself that is missing and cannot be fully defined yet continues to be felt (Li & Li, 2023). This structural lack creates psychological tension that then gives rise to desire, which drives the subject to seek fulfillment outside of themselves (Evans, 2006; Wang & Jia, 2021). In literary analysis, the concept of lack serves as

a tool for identifying the fundamental emptiness that shapes a character's motivations, inner conflicts, and behavior patterns, making it relevant for answering Research Question 1.

5. Split Subject

In Lacanian psychoanalysis, the subject is conceived as *le sujet barré* (the split or barred subject, \$), an entity that becomes structurally divided upon entering the symbolic order, namely language and the social system of meaning that shapes the way the subject understands itself (Fink, 1995; Lacan, 2014). This split arises because language is never able to fully capture subjective experience, so there is always a gap between what the subject experiences and what can be expressed through speech (Fink, 1995). Several contemporary studies support this view by showing that language practice and meaning-making inherently produce a separation within subjectivity, as speech always simplifies and limits the complexity of inner experience (Possati, 2020).

Within the Lacanian framework, this division implies the impossibility of the subject to experience wholeness in its entirety, so that subjectivity is always marked by a structural lack in the process of self-meaning (Possati, 2020; Tolis, 2023). This deficiency is not understood as a temporary condition or one that can be overcome over time, but rather as a consequence inherent in the subject's position within the symbolic order itself (Fink, 1995). Therefore, the concept of the split subject is used in this

research as an analytical tool to explain that experiences of dissatisfaction and the persistence of desire are rooted in the structure of subjectivity, not merely in personal failure or individual psychological conditions (Lacan, 2014).

6. Fantasy

In Lacanian psychoanalysis, fantasy (*fantasme*) is defined as a psychic structure that regulates the subject's position in relation to desire and the object that causes desire (Lacan, 2014). Through fantasy, the subject develops an imaginary framework that directs desire while allowing the subject to maintain the belief that the structural lack they experience can be overcome through certain fulfillment (Evans, 2006). (Fink, 1999) asserts that fantasy does not function to unify the subject as a whole, but rather supports subjectivity by postponing direct confrontation with the impossibility of wholeness. In this way, fantasy works as a mechanism that stabilizes the subject's experience by organizing the relationship between desire, lack, and meaning (Fink, 1999; Lacan, 2014).

Contemporary Lacanian studies show that fantasy plays an important role in maintaining the illusion of wholeness by constructing scenarios of fulfillment that are structurally impossible to realize (McGowan, 2016). McGowan (2016) explains that fantasy allows desire to continue moving by promising satisfaction that is always delayed, so that the subject never truly achieves the imagined wholeness. Recent research also shows that symbolic

structures and practices of meaning-making play a role in managing experiences of lack by framing them as something that appears possible to overcome, even though the lack is structural in nature (Possati, 2020). Therefore, in this study, the concept of fantasy is used as an analytical tool to explain how the persistence of unfulfilled desires actually deconstructs the illusion of wholeness within the structure of subjectivity (Lacan, 2014; McGowan, 2016).

In Lacan's theory, lack, fantasy, and split subject work in a single interconnected flow. Lack is the starting point, since the subject who lives in language and in relation to the Other always carries something uncaught and unfulfilled, desire continues to move without ever really reaching the satisfaction he seeks (Lacan, 2014). In response to that irrevocable lack, the subject constructs a fantasy. It is a psychic structure that sustains the belief that wholeness is possible. That there is a single condition that, if maintained, will eventually shut that sense of lack away. But this is precisely where the illusion of wholeness begins to be exposed. The fantasy built to cover up the lack can never be truly solid, because the lack behind it is structural and permanent. The harder the subject defends her fantasy, the more obvious it becomes that something is being hidden. And when the fantasy can no longer sustain the illusion of fullness that it has promised, the subject is forced to face the real condition. That she is a split subject that can never unite with herself. And that the wholeness she has been pursuing has never really existed. Thus, the illusion of wholeness is exposed from within, through the working of the subject's own desire structure.

Based on Lacan's psychoanalytic framework, this study uses the interconnected concepts of desire, lack, the Other, objet petit a, fantasy, and split subject as analytical tools. These concepts form a coherent web of ideas that together illuminate how desire is structured, directed, and experienced by the subject. The analysis will draw on these concepts fluidly across both research questions. Examining the formation and direction of Eleanor's unfulfilled desires in relation to the Other and objet petit a. While also tracing how lack and fantasy sustain the illusion of wholeness that her unfulfilled desires ultimately expose, revealing her condition as a split subject. Overall, this Lacanian framework provides a comprehensive lens for understanding desire, subjectivity, and the impossibility of wholeness as they manifest in the narrative of Eleanor Oliphant.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHOD

This chapter elaborates the methodology of the study, including the research design, the sources of data, procedures for data collection, and strategies for analyzing the data.

A. Research Design

This research is a form of literary criticism because it focuses on close reading and interpretation of texts to understand the psychological aspects that shape the main character. Literary criticism is used because this research takes novels as its object of study and requires analysis of the structure, meaning, and representation of the character's inner experiences. To support this reading, this research uses a psychology of literature approach with Jacques Lacan's theory of desire as its analytical framework. This theory includes the concepts of objet petit a, lack, split subject, fantasy, and desire influenced by the Other. Through this framework, this research traces how Eleanor's desires, which are never fully fulfilled, shape her actions, identity, and psychological development throughout the story.

B. Data Source

This research uses the novel *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine* by Gail Honeyman as its main data source. The novel has 336 pages and three chapters, was published in ebook form in London on May 18th, 2017, by

HarperCollins. The research data were taken from direct quotations found in the text, in the form of words, phrases, monologues, dialogues, internal narratives, and sentences related to the focus of the study, particularly those that describe the psychological dynamics and desires of the character Eleanor. All data were obtained from the first ebook version of the novel *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine*.

C. Data Collection

The data in this study were obtained from the novel *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine* (2017) written by Gail Honeyman and published by HarperCollins. Since this research uses a psychological literary approach, the data are in the form of textual evidence that reflects the character's behavior, thoughts, emotional responses, and narrative elements related to Eleanor's psychological journey.

The procedure for collecting data consisted of the following steps:

1. Conducting close-reading of the entire novel *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine* (2017) written by Gail Honeyman to comprehend its content and identify significant events and expressions related to the research focus.
2. Highlighting and annotating textual data that show indications of Eleanor's internal conflicts, emotional struggles, desires, specifically those connected to her lack, loneliness, or pursuit of connection.

3. Classifying dialogues, monologues, narrative reflections, or symbolic descriptions that showcase psychological symptoms or moments of development.

D. Data Analysis

After the data were collected, the researcher proceeded to analyze the data systematically to ensure the validity and relevance of the findings in relation to the research problem. The analysis focused on interpreting Eleanor's psychological development through the framework of Lacanian Desire theory.

1. In the first step, the researcher examined the textual data that reflect Eleanor's experiences of lack, her unfulfilled desires, and her dependence on the Other. These findings were interpreted based on key concepts of Lacanian Desire theory, such as lack, the role of the Other, fantasy, and symbolic relations.
2. In the second step, the analysis explored how Eleanor's desire operates within the structure of lack and how fantasy functions to sustain and direct her desire. At this point, the researcher examined the influence of language and symbolic interactions in shaping Eleanor's self-perception and identity.
3. In the final step, the researcher formulated a comprehensive interpretation by synthesizing the findings to explain how Eleanor's lack, fantasy, and relation to the Other contribute to her psychological development throughout the novel. This step provides an overall understanding of how

the structure of desire influences her identity formation, emotional experiences, and gradual transformation within the narrative.

CHAPTER IV

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the findings and discussion based on Lacanian psychoanalysis. It explores Eleanor's unfulfilled desires and how they shape her self-perception through relationships with others. It also discusses how these desires expose the illusion of wholeness. The analysis is divided into two sections based on the research questions.

A. Unfulfilled Desires That Shape Eleanor's Self-Perception

Eleanor Oliphant is an old woman who has been thirty years old. She lives alone and works in a graphic design firm at Glasgow. She works as a finance clerk in that firm. Eleanor is awkward socially and emotionally detached. She finds it difficult to make interpersonal relationships. Her daily routine reinforces her isolation. It limits her connection with people around her. Eleanor often keeps her distance rather than building relationships. It indicates a deeper discomfort with emotional intimacy. This condition stems from unresolved childhood experiences. It continues to shape how Eleanor perceives herself and interacts with others. As a result, she feels disconnected from her social environment even with her own emotional needs.

A turning point in Eleanor's life begins when she meets Raymond Gibbons. He is a new colleague who introduces warmth and companionship into Eleanor's life. Through the relationship, Eleanor becomes more open to social interaction. She is also encouraged to seek professional help. Later,

hidden aspects of Eleanor's past are revealed. Her past allows her to confront experiences that had remained suppressed. Eleanor's psychological development throughout the novel makes her character relevant to this study especially in examining unfulfilled desires and self-perception.

The development of Eleanor's self-perception in the novel can be understood by exploring how her unfulfilled desires are shaped and mediated by the Other, as explained within the framework of Lacanian psychoanalysis. Each phase of her psychological journey illustrates how a fundamental lack rooted in repressed past trauma and the dominance of the Other's authoritarian voice. Then, it creates various desperate desires. By analyzing these various unfulfilled desires, this section will reveal how Eleanor's self-perception was initially marked by deep self-hatred and social alienation, which ultimately led her into a relentless search to fill her lack.

1. Desire for Maternal Approval

The construction of Eleanor's self-perception is heavily influenced by the primary authority figure in her life, which is her mother. In Lacan's psychoanalytic framework, this mother figure functions as the Other. It is the one who has the power to shape a person's identity. Eleanor's negative self-perception is a result of her mother's verbal abuse since she was a child.

It can be seen in the following quote:

Mummy has always told me that I am ugly, freakish, vile. She's done so from my earliest years, even before I acquired my scars. (p. 31)

The statement above points to the fact that the Other has planted a lack within Eleanor's psychological structure. Destructive labels such as "ugly" and "worthless" were not simply accepted as insults, but internalized by Eleanor as absolute truths about her existence. She perceived herself through her mother's hatred. It ultimately robbed her of her self-respect. Even before she had a chance to truly know herself. This distortion of self-perception was the root of her identity crisis.

To conceal this lack, Eleanor eventually developed a desire to gain recognition and validation from her mother. In line with Lacan's idea (2014), which explains that a subject's desire is fundamentally always shaped by external expectations and pressures, Eleanor's desire is not truly her own. This desire is actually a manifestation of her submission to the authority of the Other. This becomes very clear when Eleanor decides to look for a partner:

I was fine, perfectly fine on my own, but I needed to keep Mummy happy, keep her calm so she would leave me in peace. A boyfriend – a husband? – might just do the trick. It wasn't that I needed anyone. I was, as previously stated, perfectly fine. (p. 29)

From this statement, it is clear that Eleanor does not actually have a real desire to form a romantic relationship for her own happiness. Her primary reason for seeking a potential husband is purely driven by a desire for her mother's approval. She treats this process as a transaction to keep her mother at ease and stop attacking her. Ultimately, Eleanor's desire was never aimed at seeking an emotional connection with another person, it is simply a means of survival to meet the expectations of the Other.

This desire to please her mother gradually turned into an unhealthy obsession. Eleanor did not even see her potential partner as a whole person. She saw him as nothing more than an object or an achievement to show off. This was clearly evident when she planned her approach to the musician:

'I simply came across someone ... nice ... and I want to find out a bit more about ... that someone.' I needed to polish and perfect things before I plucked up the courage to share my shiny new jewel with her, set it before her for her approval. (p. 35)

Her statement referring to the man as a “shiny new jewel” underscores that the musician is nothing more than a tool. According to Lacan (2018), these kinds of objects are used by the subject as illusions to fill a lack. Eleanor felt the need to polish her “jewel” in such a way solely to gain validation. She felt her life had to appear perfect first so that she would be worthy of recognition from the Other, which was her mother.

The mother’s dominance was also maintained by deliberately fueling Eleanor’s sense of insecurity. Instead of welcoming Eleanor’s decision to start talking about her plans to find a partner, the mother took advantage of the moment to corner her once again with a manipulative demand:

'How marvellous! I shall look forward to regular updates on this project of yours, Eleanor,' she said brightly. 'You know how much I'd love for you to find someone special. Someone appropriate. All these talks we've had, over the years: I've always had the impression that you're missing out, not having someone significant in your life. It's good that you've started looking for ... your other half. A partner in crime, as it were.' She laughed quietly. (p. 35)

Through those words, the Other once again dictates the reality Eleanor must live. Her mother intentionally convinces Eleanor that she is indeed missing out on something important in her life. Her mother then

demands that Eleanor find someone who is “appropriate” according to her standards. This psychological manipulation ensures that Eleanor’s desire for validation will never be truly satisfied, since those standards of worth are entirely held and controlled by her mother.

When the subject obeys the laws of the Other completely, she loses autonomy over her own self. Eleanor constantly forces herself into the role of the obedient daughter to please her mother, even though she must suppress the bitter reality that she is a victim of abuse. This blind devotion is evident in how she accepts these rules without questioning it:

‘The thing is, even after everything that she’s done, after all of it, she’s still my mummy. She’s the only one I’ve got. And good girls love their mothers. (p. 264)

That statement reveals how deeply Eleanor has internalized her identity as a “good girl.” In line with Lacan (2018) central axiom that human desire is fundamentally the desire of the Other. This moral concept of the good girl does not stem from Eleanor’s conscious decision at all. She desires to be an obedient daughter purely because it is a demand enforced upon her.

This compulsion was further reinforced by the presence of a threatening doctrine. This thing was constantly repeated in her head:

‘Mummy doesn’t like naughty girls who talk back, you know that.’ Old ground, this – a reprimand I’d heard so many times before. (p. 278)

In the context of Lacan psychoanalysis (2018), the nagging voice in Eleanor’s head is not merely a bad memory; it is a manifestation of the authority of the Other that controls the subject’s mind. Eleanor’s recognition

of how well she knew those reprimands indicates how the Other's authority holds absolute power. Even when her mother was not around, the rules lived and controlled Eleanor's thoughts. Instead of rebelling, she kept trying to justify it to fill the lack within herself. She believed that if she met her mother's expectations, she would finally be loved and it will complete her life. This shows how her desire for validation had turned into a prison. Eleanor did not even realize that this mindless obedience was slowly consuming her own mental health. Her efforts to fulfill the mother's demands still did not bring Eleanor the affection she yearned for. This clearly shows that Eleanor was trapped in an unfulfilled desire.

2. Desire for Normalcy

Eleanor lives under the shadow of the perception that she is flawed. It is a symbolic pressure she faces from her social environment. This made Eleanor unwilling to stand out and afraid of looking odd to those around. To compensate for this lack, she immersed herself in the standards set by society. As if becoming normal were the only way she could breathe freely. This desire to blend in is reflected in her efforts to camouflage by following tips from magazines. It can be seen from the following quote:

These magazines could tell me which clothes and shoes to wear, how to have my hair styled in order to fit in. They could show me the right kind of makeup to buy and how to apply it. This way, I would disappear into everywoman acceptability. I would not be stared at. The goal, ultimately, was successful camouflage as a human woman. (p. 31)

This quote emphasizes that for Eleanor, becoming a normal woman is a performative project driven by the Desire of the Other. Here, the

magazine is not solely a medium of information, it is more like an embodiment of the Other. This is a symbolic authority that sets the standards for social acceptance. People tend to view beauty as a form of self-expression, but Eleanor sees it as a signifier she must adopt to be recognized by the world. According to Lacan (2018), Eleanor's desire here is not her autonomous desire, but a desire that has been taken over by the Other. She perceives herself as an anomaly that threatens her existence, so she must use camouflage to cover up this lack. For her, the only way to silence the judgmental gaze that has always affirmed her unworthiness in the social sphere is to be invisible behind the standards of beauty.

Eleanor carries this desire to blend in with her surroundings into private spaces as well, such as when she gets a treatment at the salon. She views the salon experience as a concrete step toward establishing her status as an adult woman accepted by the world. Yet, the reality clashes with her expectations:

I felt my fists clench tight, and shook my head in disbelief. I had come here to start to become a normal woman, and instead she'd made me look like a child. 'Kayla,' I said, unable to believe the situation I now found myself in, 'the man in whom I am interested is a normal adult man. He will enjoy sexual relations with a normal adult woman. Are you trying to imply that he's some sort of paedophile? How dare you!' (p. 22)

The incident at the salon revealed how fragile the construction of normality that Eleanor has built. She came with the ambition to transform herself into the idealized image of a mature woman as defined by social standards, yet Eleanor felt humiliated because the results of her treatment did not match her expectations. Eleanor's outburst in front of Kayla exposes

her emotional dependence on physical validation as an objet petit a. It is an object of desire she believes can compensate for her lack of self-worth. The treatment results that made her look like a “little girl” were not just about her appearance but a fatal failure to live up to the ideal self-image she projected to others.

Eleanor fully aware that she does not have natural access to the society's structure. She knew her position as a subject who is constantly ignored, so she was not surprised when others chose to interact with Raymond rather than her. In a situation that was unfamiliar and demanded social compatibility, Eleanor chose to mirror Raymond's behavior as a strategy to borrow social legitimacy. It can be seen in the following quote:

‘Come in,’ she said, smiling at Raymond. ‘Dad’ll be pleased to see you.’ She didn’t smile at me, which is the normal state of affairs in most encounters I have with other people. We entered, Raymond wiping his feet elaborately on the doormat. I copied him. It was truly an unforeseen day when I would look to Raymond for social guidance. (p. 124)

This act of mimicking Raymond's gestures reflects Eleanor's dependence. In Eleanor's eyes, Raymond is a subject who has access to society's symbolic order, which he is an acceptable figure. Thus, mimicking Raymond becomes a strategy for gaining legitimacy in the public space. By mimicking this behavior, Eleanor is borrowing the signifier of normality so that her invisible presence may at least not be considered disruptive.

In Lacan's theory (2018), this action clarifies Eleanor's position as a split subject. Because she feels she lacks authority within the social order, she surrenders control of her actions to others whom she perceives as having

that authority. She does not express herself, but mimics behavior to minimize the distance between herself and society. Raymond becomes a bridge for Eleanor to enter the domestic spaces of others. He is also simultaneously functioning as a mirror that confirms Eleanor's own sense of inadequacy in receiving the same warm welcome. She becomes a shadow of Raymond. It is an ironic step for someone who has long desired to live independently and normally.

Eleanor puts herself on the cusp between the socially functional subject and the mad subject as she tries to justify her habit of talking to plants. The rhetorical questions she poses stem not from loneliness, but from a fear of judgment by the Other, which is the anonymous social authority that determines the criteria for sanity. It can be seen on the following quote:

A philosophical question: if a tree falls in a forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound? And if a woman who's wholly alone occasionally talks to a pot plant, is she certifiable? I'm confident that it is perfectly normal to talk to oneself occasionally. It's not as though I'm expecting a reply. I'm fully aware that Polly is a houseplant. (p. 52)

In Lacan's view (2014), Eleanor is engaging in self-policing to keep herself aligned with symbolic norms. She is not seeking a friend in Polly; she is constructing a rational argument to convince the Other that she still qualifies as a normal person. If she fails to convince herself that her behavior is normal, she will fall into the category of deviant. That would isolate her from the symbolic order. Therefore, normalcy here is no longer about personality traits. It is about a way to prevent the subject from being destroyed by the label of madness.

Eleanor's desire for a normal life often intensifies when she witnesses the seemingly healthy and structured lives of others. For Eleanor, her observations of the Raymond family's life are not typical social observations, it is a process of comparison that continually highlights the lack in her own life. She views the Raymond family's life as a reflection of an ideal symbolic order. A place where identity is formed through harmonious relationships and established social acceptance. This tension is clearly evident when she reflects on the fundamental differences between her own world and the Raymond family's life:

Everything felt safe, everything felt normal. How different Raymond's life had been from mine – a proper family, a mother and a father and a sister, nestled amongst other proper families. How different it was still; every Sunday, here, this. (p. 91)

In this statement, Eleanor positions Raymond's family life as an objet petit a, an imaginary construct she believes can fill the lack in her subjectivity. She views Raymond's life not as an equivalent reality, but as an ideal symbolic order, where every family member has a proper place in the eyes of the Other. The contrast she draws between her own fragmented life and Raymond's structured life reveals that Eleanor's desire for normality is a desire to be recognized by that symbolic order.

From a Lacanian perspective (2014), Eleanor is trapped in a fantasy that dictates normality is something she can attain only if she can replicate the family structure she observes. She does not want peace of mind. She seeks validation from the Other, represented by Raymond's family. Her obsession with the word "proper" emphasizes that, for Eleanor, her current

identity is a failure. As a result, she constantly tries to borrow signifiers from others to fill the existential lack she feels.

In Eleanor's efforts to integrate herself into the social order, she often positions herself as a passive subject in the presence of the Other. This position is a strategy employed by the subject to minimize the lack through compliance with symbolic standards dictated by external authorities. The tension between the ambition to simply "appear normal" and the pressure to "appear beautiful" becomes a turning point that reveals how the structure of Eleanor's subjectivity operates in the face of social expectations. This can be observed through the following quote:

'Would it be a normal human hair colour? I don't think I'd like pink or blue or anything like that.' 'I'll give you a shoulder-length, lightly layered choppy bob, with caramel and honey pieces woven through and a long sweeping fringe,' she said. 'How does that sound?' 'It sounds like an incomprehensible pile of gibberish,' I said. She laughed at my reflection, and then stopped, perhaps because I wasn't laughing. 'Trust me, Eleanor,' she said earnestly. 'It'll be beautiful.' 'Beautiful is not a word normally associated with my appearance,' I said, highly sceptical. She patted my arm. (p. 132-133)

This quote suggests that for Eleanor, normalcy is an attribute that actually transcends the boundaries of her subjective security. According to Lacan (2014), the subject often defines herself through a fantasy that maintains stability in the face of the Other's gaze. In this context, Eleanor's rejection of the word beautiful is a reaction to a threat to her fantasy of invisible normality. Since she has internalized her identity as a subject who must hide to avoid becoming a target, becoming beautiful actually places her in a vulnerable position by making her the center of attention. Thus,

Eleanor's project of normality is not aimed at achieving beauty, but at asserting her position as a subject so as not to be categorized as an anomaly.

In the context of Eleanor's subjectivity, there is a shift from attempts at physical transformation toward the articulation of past trauma through verbal narration. At this point, Eleanor articulates her childhood memories as part of an effort to construct a stable life. This is captured in the following dialogue between her and Raymond:

Did I deserve nice things? 'It's funny, you know, Raymond,' I said. 'Growing up with Mummy was very disorientating. Sometimes she gave us nice things, other times ... not. I mean, one week we'd be dipping quails' eggs in celery salt and shucking oysters, the next we'd be starving. I mean, you know, literally, deprived of food and water,' I said. His eyes widened. 'Everything was always extreme, so extreme, with her,' I said, nodding to myself. 'I used to long for normal. You know, three meals a day, ordinary stuff – tomato soup, mashed potatoes, cornflakes ...' (p. 242-243)

This quote reveals that Eleanor's rhetorical question, "*Did I deserve nice things?*", is clear evidence of self-misrecognition. In Eleanor's eyes, self-worth is something to be questioned, as she has internalized past trauma as the standard of her identity. Meanwhile, the line of food items such as "*tomato soup, mashed potatoes, cornflakes*" is not merely a menu, but a signifier of Eleanor's fantasy of wholeness. In Lacan theory (2014), Need (biological need) is often overshadowed by Demand (the demand for recognition or affection). "Ordinary" foods become symbols that she has been "acknowledged" by the symbolic order. By yearning for ordinary things, she is attempting to rebuild a fantasy in which the lack resulting from past trauma can be covered by regularity, a step she believes is the path to normality.

3. Desire for Love

Beyond pursuing normality through self-adjustment to social standards, Eleanor's desire also leads to a search for a deeper form of recognition in the form of love. Within the framework of Lacan (2014), love is not solely a romantic attraction, it is a mechanism through which the subject seeks wholeness through union with the Other. Love becomes an imaginary space for Eleanor to validate her existence as a worthy human being. While also serving as the primary target of her unfulfilled desires.

In Eleanor's subjectivity, the desire for love does not come from a simple need for affection, instead it is an attempt to mend her structural lack by projecting wholeness onto another person. The singer she meets becomes her objet petit, an object that promises the unification of identity she has long been unable to achieve. This is clearly expressed when she first constructs the man's identity as a response to her own lack:

I am a self-contained entity. That's what I've always told myself, at any rate. But last night, I'd found the love of my life. When I saw him walk on stage, I just knew. He was wearing a very stylish hat, but that wasn't what drew me in. No – I'm not that shallow. He was wearing a three-piece suit, with the bottom button of his waistcoat unfastened. A true gentleman leaves the bottom button unfastened, Mummy always said – it was one of the signs to look out for, signifying as it did a sophisticate, an elegant man of the appropriate class and social standing. His handsome face, his voice ... here, at long last, was a man who could be described with some degree of certainty as 'husband material'. (p. 15)

From Lacan's perspective (2014), Eleanor's attachment to the singer is a form of grafting desire onto an object she has constructed herself. When she highlights details such as “a three-piece suit” and “the bottom button of his waistcoat,” Eleanor is not looking at a whole human subject. Instead,

she is consuming a series of signifiers she learned from her mother as an access code to the symbolic order. Eleanor sees the singer as an objet petit a, not in the sense that she desires his body, but the status he carries.

The singer is represented as a subject with full access to the symbolic order, he possesses social class, elegance, and public acceptance. Here, Eleanor is undergoing a process of imaginary identification; she believes that by aligning herself with this man, she can shed her identity as a broken loner and replace it with a new identity as the partner of a respectable man. Eleanor's yearning for a "husband material" figure is a form of demand for the symbolic order as represented by her mother through fashion codes to acknowledge her existence.

In an effort to articulate her desire, Eleanor frames her body as an object that must be transformed in order to be recognized by the person she desires. This desire for love demands an effort as a way to make herself worthy in the eyes of the Other. This is evident when she decides to change her appearance:

Normally, I wasn't at all interested in my hair and I hadn't had it cut since I was thirteen years old. It ran down to my waist, straight and light brown – just hair, nothing more, nothing less. I barely noticed it, in truth. I knew, though, that for the singer to fall in love with me, I'd need to make much more of an effort. (p. 126)

This quote indicates that Eleanor views her hair not just as a part of her body, but as a signifier that can be altered to serve as an effort to fit into the romantic scenario she desires. The act of cutting her hair that she had let grow for over a decade, is one manifestation of the subject's compliance

with the demand for love. The line “more of an effort” indicates that Eleanor acknowledges her subjectivity must be ‘re-formatted’ to align with the beauty standards she imagines the singer desires. For her, beauty is not an expression of self, but a symbolic commodity she must exchange to gain the Other’s attention. She is changing her hair for trying to erase traces of her past identity that she considers an obstacle to being loved. This action emphasizes that Eleanor’s desire for love is a project requiring the sacrifice of her subjectivity, where she is willing to change herself to meet the standards she has created in her own mind.

In keeping with her desire for love, Eleanor also steps into an imaginary space. Her desire for love involves not only physical efforts but also the creation of romantic scenarios in her mind. Eleanor uses these scenarios as a space where her desires can operate beyond the reality. This is evident in how she imagines her future with the singer:

I wondered what sort of gift the handsome singer might give me, for an anniversary, say, or for Christmas. No, wait – for Valentine’s Day, the most special, romantic day of the year. He’d write a song for me, something beautiful, and then play it for me on his guitar while I sipped perfectly chilled champagne. (p. 60)

This statement shows that fantasy is an active structure that supports her subjectivity. According to Lacan (2014), fantasy serves to cover up lack by offering a scenario of delayed satisfaction. By imagining the perfect Valentine’s Day moment, Eleanor is creating an imaginary world where she can be a subject worthy of love and attention. It is a position whose she always doubts exist in the real world.

The choice of objects in her fantasy, such as “chilled champagne” and “a song written just for her” are symbolic commodities representing an appropriate upper-class lifestyle. This fantasy ensures that Eleanor’s desire will always remain in a state of unfulfilled. As this fantasy is imaginary, Eleanor does not have to face the risk of real rejection from the actual subject. In this way, she maintains her position as a desiring subject while also protect herself from confronting the reality that the singer is just a stranger who is unaware of her existence.

4. Desire for Absolution

In this novel, the dynamics of Eleanor’s subjectivity shift her desire for love into an urgent desire for absolution. A state in which she can be cleansed of the moral burden that binds her. Eleanor perceives guilt as a structure she believes has become inseparable from her very existence. Eleanor’s desire for this forgiveness stems from the belief that she carries a legacy of stain inherited from her mother. For this, she feels the need to redeem herself so that she is no longer an anomaly in the world. Eleanor’s attempt to articulate this internal stain is manifested in the following dialogue:

‘Mummy’s a bad person,’ I said. ‘Really bad. I know that, I’ve always known that. And I wondered ... do you think I might be bad too? People inherit all sorts of things from their parents, don’t they – varicose veins, heart disease. Can you inherit badness?’ (p. 263)

This quote points out that Eleanor's desire for absolution stems from the subject's attempt to find a biological explanation for her sin. Eleanor is seeking to find a physical justification for her guilt. Within the framework

of Lacanian psychoanalysis (2014), Eleanor's desire here functions as a form of self-defense, as she wants to believe that badness is something genetic and inevitable. In this way, she attempts to stabilize her position as a subject with a defect. This is because if guilt were something she could eliminate, she would have to confront a far more terrifying reality of trauma. Eleanor's desire to feel biologically "bad" is her way of preserving her identity so it does not collapse under the pressure of the true reality of her past.

Eleanor's desire for absolution goes beyond trying to redeem herself of her past. This desire leads Eleanor deeper into the labyrinth of memories about her sister. To the memories she has kept tightly buried. As she reflects on that tragedy, Eleanor's desire leads her to an honest acknowledgment of the burden she has long carried alone. Here is how Eleanor's desire for absolution shapes her guilt in the following narrative:

'It's the guilt, though,' I said, whispering. It was very hard to speak, physically hard, trying to force out sound. 'I was her big sister, I should have been looking out for her. She was so small. I did try, I really did, but it just ... it wasn't enough. I failed her, Maria, I'm still here and that's all wrong. It should be her who survived. I don't deserve to be happy, I don't deserve to have a nice life when Marianne ...' (p. 265)

In this narrative, Eleanor's desire is trapped in survivor's guilt. In Lacanian framework, this can be interpreted as the subject's desire to remain in a position of punishment. By declaring that "*I don't deserve to be happy*", Eleanor's desire constructs a fantasy where suffering is the only truth. It makes her existence feel meaningful. The peak of this is seen clearly in the line, "*I'm still here and that's all wrong*". This sentence is a statement of

existential denial. From a Lacan psychoanalysis (2014), this line indicates that Eleanor's desire has been severely distorted. She sees the fact of her own existence, "*I'm still here,*" as a logical error.

She does not see herself as a surviving subject, but rather as "trash" that should not exist. For Eleanor, Absolution is not simply about being forgiven, but about how she must continue to "destroy" herself as a form of payment for the wrongs she believes she has committed. This guilt acts as an anchor that keeps Eleanor's desires from breaking free from the shadows of her past, for without that burden of sin. Without it, she feels she would lose the reason to remain who she is today. By positioning herself as a subject who must be punished, Eleanor's desire paradoxically protects her from the necessity of living as a whole and free human being. She feels that such wholeness is a betrayal of her sister's legacy.

B. Eleanor's Unfulfilled Desires Expose the Illusion of Wholeness

Within the framework of Lacan's theory, the illusion of wholeness does expose from within, through the work of the subject's own desire structure. Lacan explained that every subject that enters into language and its relationship with the Other carries a deficiency that cannot be eliminated. Because language can never fully represent the subject and there is always something that is not captured in every relationship with the Other (Lacan, 2014). In response to that lack, the subject builds a fantasy as a psychic structure that sustains the belief that wholeness is possible. This is because human desires are basically not

directed to concrete objects but to fantasy itself (Lacan, 2014). But it is precisely the constant movement of desire that slowly shows that the fantasy is never solid from the start, and that the real subject is a split subject that can never unite with itself. It is through these three stages that Eleanor's illusion of wholeness is exposed in the novel. First, through the lack that she has been denying. The second through the fantasy she has built to cover the lack. Lastly, the third through her acceptance as a split subject that puts an end to the illusion of wholeness completely.

1. Lack

Eleanor's unfulfilled desire for maternal approval was at the root of her deepest lack. Throughout the novel, Eleanor carries the burden of an unanswered desire. A desire to be loved and recognized by her mother as the most important Other in her life. This lack is not something peripheral in its subjectivity. It is the foundation from which all of Eleanor's other desires branch out. The most explicit point of this *lack* is revealed when Eleanor is finally forced to confront the source of all that she has been pursuing:

Why did I start to allow myself to think I could live a normal life, a happy life, the kind other people had? Why did I think that the singer could be part of that, help bring it about? The answer stabs at me: Mummy. I wanted Mummy to love me. I'd been alone for so long. I needed someone by my side to help me manage Mummy. Why wasn't there someone, anyone, to help me manage Mummy? (p. 199)

Sentence "*I wanted Mummy to love me. I'd been alone for so long*" is the most explicit confession of Eleanor's lack throughout the novel. Here Eleanor no longer denies or questions. She admits directly that the real

desire underlying all her behavior is the desire for love and recognition from her mother, which she never earned. Lacan explains that the subject's desire is situated in the gap between the demand she makes of the Other and the demand for love and recognition that she actually seeks from the Other (Lacan, 2014). Eleanor has carried this lack for a long time. The absence of maternal love was the most fundamental lack of her life. It drives her to keep looking for substitute object after substitute object without ever really finding what she was looking for.

Eleanor's lack of desire for normalcy is seen very early in the novel, long before she realizes it. In contrast to the desire for maternal approval, which she finally explicitly admitted. This lack of desire for normalcy first appeared in the form of a loud and structured denial:

I have always taken great pride in managing my life alone. I'm a sole survivor – I'm Eleanor Oliphant. I don't need anyone else – there's no big hole in my life, no missing part of my own particular puzzle. (p. 15)

Eleanor's statement in the sentence "*there's no big hole in my life, no missing part of my own particular puzzle*" is a form of denial that actually proves the existence of the lack itself. Because a truly intact subject doesn't need to assert its wholeness so harshly. Lacan explained that lack is a structural condition that cannot be avoided by the subject who lives in language and in relation to the Other, because in that relationship there is always something that is not captured and unfulfilled (Lacan, 2014). Eleanor is fighting her reality. The claim that her life has no gaps is an inverted mirror of the desire for normalcy that she never had. It's a life that

feels natural, connected, and whole like everyone else seems to have so easily. What she does is deny them by building a narrative that she does not need anyone.

Eleanor's lack of desire for romantic love is exposed through the moment of consciousness that comes suddenly when reality finally penetrates the construction she has been building:

I was a thirty-year-old woman with a juvenile crush on a man whom I didn't know, and would never know. I had convinced myself that he was the one, that he would help to make me normal, fix the things that were wrong with my life. Someone to help me deal with Mummy, block out her voice when she whispered in my ear, telling me I was bad, I was wrong, I wasn't good enough. (p. 196)

The phrase "*a man whom I didn't know, and would never know*" is a direct acknowledgment that Eleanor's desire for romantic love has never had a real object. It is always directed to someone who is unreachable and can never be reached. Lacan explains that desire is never really directed to the concrete object but to what the object seems to promise. Because desire is always situated in the gap between what is asked for and what is actually sought (Lacan, 2014). Eleanor did not really want the singer. She wanted what she projected onto him. Someone who could help her feel normal, who could silence her mother's voice, who could fill the gap that had been gaping in her for a long time. Eleanor's desire for romantic love is a desire that can never be fulfilled from the beginning. Not because the object is unattainable, but because the true object of her desire. A sense of wholeness and acknowledgement can never be given by anyone.

Eleanor's lack of desire for absolution is most evident in her relationship with Marianne. Her sister who died in the fire. The whole burden of guilt was stored in one sentence that Eleanor said to herself:

I'd brought it on myself as usual, my own stupid fault, stupid Eleanor, and, worst of all, I'd dragged Marianne into it too. She'd done nothing wrong. She'd never done anything wrong. (p. 256)

The phrases "*my own stupid fault*" and "*I'd dragged Marianne into it too*" are direct manifestations of Eleanor's deepest lack. Eleanor carries a sense of guilt for her sister's death that she never solved. She never forgave herself and never got her forgiveness. Lacan explains that the subject's desire is situated in the gap between the demand he makes of the Other and the demand for recognition that she actually seeks (Lacan, 2014). Eleanor's desire for absolution is one that has no object to answer. Marianne is gone, her mother has never given her the truth, and Eleanor herself does not know how to forgive herself. This lack was never fulfilled because Eleanor for years did not even dare to admit that the desire existed.

2. Fantasy

If lack is a condition that Eleanor denies, then fantasy is the structure she builds to maintain that denial. Lacan explains that in response to an irrevocable lack, the subject constructs the fantasy as a psychic scenario that allows desire to keep moving by convincing the subject that wholeness is possible. That there is a condition, an object, or a narrative that, if maintained, will make everything feel complete (Lacan, 2014). In Eleanor's case, the fantasy takes on a very specific form. It is the narrative that she is

an independent, whole, and needless individual. *This fantasy* has been supporting her life as well as slowly showing that the illusion of wholeness that she maintains has never been really solid.

The fantasy of Eleanor's desire for maternal approval is not the hope that her mother will transform into a loving figure. It is a much more fundamental belief that maintaining a connection with her mother, however destructive, is the only way she can feel the Other. This was revealed when Eleanor spoke to her therapist about her decision to end her relationship with her mother:

'The thing is, even after everything that she's done, after all of it, she's still my mummy. She's the only one I've got. And good girls love their mothers. After the fire, I was always so lonely. Any mummy was better than no mummy ...' (p. 265)

The phrase "*any mummy was better than no mummy*" is at the heart of Eleanor's fantasy. It is a psychic structure that has been supporting her by convincing her that the Other that hurt her is still better than no Other at all. Lacan explained that human desire is not directed to the concrete object but to the fantasy itself, because fantasy is the only way the subject can imagine that his lack may be closed (Lacan, 2014). Eleanor did not want her real mother. She wanted what her mother seemed to promise, which are recognition that she was a good child, that she was worthy of love, that she existed. It is this fantasy that for years has made her continue to maintain a relationship that only drains and hurts her. Because without that fantasy she has to face the fact that the lack of maternal recognition will never be fulfilled from anywhere.

Eleanor's fantasy of the desire for normalcy evident is in the way she views the lives of others. As she spent time at Raymond's family home, something that had only been in her shadow suddenly appeared before her eyes:

Everything felt safe, everything felt normal. How different Raymond's life had been from mine – a proper family, a mother and a father and a sister, nestled amongst other proper families. (p. 91)

The word "*proper*" that Eleanor uses twice in one sentence is the key to this fantasy. She is measuring her own life against the standard of integrity she imagines to be normal. Lacan explained that human desire is not directed to his concrete object but to fantasy itself, because fantasy is a structure that allows the subject to imagine that wholeness may exist and may be achieved (Lacan, 2014). Raymond's life is a screen on which Eleanor projects the fantasy normalcy that has sustained her. A "*proper*" family, a home that feels "*safe*," a mother who is present and kind. All these are elements of a scenario that Eleanor believes could be hers if she puts in enough effort to achieve it. This fantasy is what makes Eleanor continue to pursue the image of a normal life even though the lack behind it never gives her enough footing to really get there.

Eleanor's fantasy of desire for romantic love does not stop at the beautiful scenario with the singer. She is much bigger than that. The night before she goes to a concert to meet someone she does not know, Eleanor builds a conviction that reveals the true function of this fantasy:

Tonight, I was going to meet the man whose love would change my life. I was ready to rise from the ashes and be reborn. (p. 191)

The phrase "*rise from the ashes and be reborn*" is the most explicit expression of what Eleanor is really pursuing through her romantic love fantasy is a total transformation of herself. Eleanor did not want the singer to be human. She wanted what she projected to him. Which are the power to make her whole, to save her from herself, to close all the gaps that had been gaping in her life. Lacan explained that human desire is not directed to the concrete object but to the fantasy itself, because fantasy is a structure that allows the subject to imagine that wholeness is possible even though the lack is structural and permanent (Lacan, 2014). Eleanor's romantic love fantasy is the way she projects her entire hope of fullness into a single object. And precisely because that object is not real to her, it can continue to live on without ever being tested by reality.

The fantasy of Eleanor's desire for absolution comes as a desperate conviction that the guilt she carries over Marianne's death can be resolved if she finds the right way. The most explicit moment of this fantasy is revealed when Eleanor finally begins to open up to her therapist about Marianne:

'What do I do?' I said, desperate, suddenly, to move forward, to get better, to live. 'How do I fix this? How do I fix me?' (p. 257)

The line "*how do I fix me?*" is at the heart of Eleanor's fantasy desire for absolution. The belief that there is something that can be done, that there

is a point at which the guilt can be resolved and she can become a whole subject without Marianne's burden. Lacan explained that human desire is not directed to the concrete object but to the fantasy itself, because fantasy is a structure that allows the subject to imagine that wholeness is possible even though the lack is structural and permanent (Lacan, 2014). Eleanor's fantasy absolution is her way of maintaining the belief that there is a fixed version of her. A version that no longer carries guilt over Marianne, who has been forgiven, who is already intact. It is this fantasy that has been supporting her to continue living, as well as exposing that the illusion of wholeness that she is pursuing is not something that can be achieved through any improvement. Instead, something that has never existed since the beginning.

3. Split Subject

If lack is a condition that Eleanor denies and fantasy is the structure she constructs to maintain that denial. Then, the split subject is the real condition that is slowly exposed when the fantasy can no longer sustain the illusion of wholeness that she maintains. Lacan explains that the subject is inherently divided, there is an irbridgeable chasm between what the subject believes about himself and what actually moves him from the subconscious (Lacan, 2014). Eleanor has been building a narrative that she is a whole, independent, and well-being subject. But behind that narrative, unfulfilled desires continue to move and continue to leak cracks in that construction. The moments when the crack can no longer be hidden are the moments in

which Eleanor is forced to confront herself as a split subject. It is precisely from there that her illusion of wholeness is most explicit.

The split subject of Eleanor's desire for maternal approval was exposed through one simple confession she made to her therapist after many years:

'I knew that something about her was very, very wrong. I've always known, as long as I can remember. But I didn't tell anyone. And people died ...'

The phrase *"I've always known"* is the one that reveals Eleanor's split subject the most. She did not realize that her mother was wrong at that moment. She knew a long time ago. But that knowledge never changed the way she acted. She kept seeking her mother's approval, kept calling her every week, kept maintaining a relationship that only hurt her. Lacan explained that the split subject is a condition in which there is always a gap between what the subject knows consciously and what actually moves him from the subconscious (Lacan, 2014). That was the chasm that Eleanor had been hiding from others and from herself. The *"but I didn't tell anyone"* confession shows that Eleanor was aware of the truth long before she was ready to face it. And that all the fantasy of maternal approval she built up was not because she did not know her mother was destructive. It because she knew and still could not let go of the desire for that never-coming confession.

The split subject of Eleanor's desire for normalcy is exposed in the moment when she can no longer maintain the distance between her claim to a fine life and the reality she feels:

On some level, I realized that this was wrong. I'd lifted my head up just high enough to see that, and, desperate to change, I'd clutched at a random straw, let myself get carried away, imagining some sort of ... future. (p. 199)

The phrase "*on some level*" is the key to the split subject here, Eleanor is not fully conscious and not completely unconscious. There is a part of her that knows her life is wrong. But that part has been suppressed under the narrative that she is fine and does not need anyone. Lacan explained that the split subject is a condition in which there is always a gap between what the subject knows consciously and what actually moves him from the subconscious (Lacan, 2014). Eleanor claims her life is normal and sufficient. But at the same time secretly imagines "*some sort of future*" something different from the one she has now. The gap between the claim of normalcy and the desire for a truly different life is what she can no longer hide at this moment, and which exposes that the wholeness she has maintained she has never really felt.

The split subject of Eleanor's desire for romantic love is most vividly exposed in the moment when she sees the singer in person and the entire fantasy she has built collapses in the face of reality:

I didn't know the man on stage before me, didn't know the first thing about him. It was all just fantasy. Could anything be more pathetic – me, a grown woman? I'd told myself a sad little fairy tale, thinking that I could fix everything, undo the past, that he and I would live happily ever after

and Mummy wouldn't be angry any more. I was Eleanor, sad little Eleanor Oliphant, with my pathetic job, my vodka and my dinners for one, and I always would be. (p. 196)

The phrase "*I'd told myself a sad little fairy tale*" is the moment Eleanor realizes the gap between what she believes in and what she really pursues. Eleanor's desire for romantic love has never been about the singer. It is a vehicle for something much deeper, a desire to mend the past, silence her mother's voice, and feel whole. Lacan explained that the split subject is a condition which there is always a gap between what the subject knows consciously and what actually moves her from the subconscious (Lacan, 2014). Eleanor thinks she wants romantic love. But what she is really pursuing is the absolution and normalcy that she projects into the singer's figure. The moment when she calls the fantasy a "*sad little fairy tale*" is the moment her split subject is exposed. The chasm between the romantic narrative she consciously builds and the desire that actually moves her can no longer be hidden.

The split subject of Eleanor's desire for absolution is exposed in the novel's most painful moment when she can finally no longer hold on to the fantasy that her guilt for Marianne can be resolved:

I couldn't be put right. The past could neither be escaped nor undone. (p. 196)

The phrase "*I couldn't be put right*" is the direct antithesis of the fantasy absolution that Eleanor has been holding for, that there is a way to fix herself, that there is a point at which the guilt can be resolved. Lacan

explained that the split subject is a condition in which there is always a gap between what the subject knows consciously and what actually moves him from the subconscious (Lacan, 2014). Eleanor has been moving on the basis of the belief that she can be fixed. But at the same time, on a deeper level, she knows that what happened to Marianne cannot be changed by anything she does. The gap between the fantasy that absolution is possible and the subconscious knowledge that the past is irreversible is what is finally exposed here. *"The past could neither be escaped nor undone"* is not a new conclusion. It is a truth that Eleanor has known but cannot face. And that she can no longer hide from herself.

The above analysis shows that Eleanor's unfulfilled desires expose the illusion of wholeness through three causally interconnected stages. First, the lack proves that Eleanor's desires are never fulfilled. The desire for maternal approval, normalcy, love, and absolution all lead to structural gaps that no object can close. Second, precisely because of that inexorable lack, Eleanor constructs fantasy as a psychic structure that convinces her that wholeness is possible. Which that a destructive mother can still give her a confession, that independent life is wholeness, that the singer can save her, that the guilt over Marianne can be resolved.

The fantasy itself shows that Eleanor's illusion of wholeness is never solid. Because a truly intact subject does not need to build a scenario of wholeness in order to survive. Third, when fantasy can no longer cover the void behind it, Eleanor is forced to confront herself as a split subject. The chasm between what she claims

to be about herself and what really moves her is clearly exposed. Thus, Eleanor's unfulfilled desires are not only evidence that she is lacking something. It is also a mechanism that structurally dismantles that the wholeness she has been pursuing has never really existed.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

In this chapter, the researcher presents the conclusion of this study and offers suggestion for future research. The conclusion is formulated based on the results of an analysis of the unfulfilled desires of the main character reflected in *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine* by Gail Honeyman. This analytical process is examined using the Lacanian Desire framework (2014), revealing how the structure of desire, lack, and the Other shape the main character's self-perception. This analysis also reveals how these unfulfilled desires ultimately expose the illusion of wholeness.

A. Conclusion

This study found that the focus of this novel lies in the psychological journey of the main character who struggles with extreme emotional isolation. It is trapped in the dominance of a destructive authority. She struggles to rediscover her existence among the life she built on a foundation of fantasy. This emotional journey is in line with the theoretical framework of Lacan (2018), which forms the foundation of this study in analyzes how the structures of desire, lack, and the Other shape the main character's psychological condition.

Related to the first research question, this research found that Eleanor's unfulfilled desires were shaped by her mother's dominant authority. The mother was the Big Other. Eleanor's self-perception constructed through the

destructive lens of her mother's voice. This voice had planted a deep lack in her since childhood. The lack manifested in four interrelated desires. The desire for maternal approval, normalcy, love, and absolution. The desires reflect her continuous efforts to fill the lack left by the absence of her mother's affection. Her desire for maternal approval reveals that demands of the Other has been held hostage Eleanor. Eleanor internalizes her mother's destructive labels as absolute truths. It reduces herself to an object that must be perfected. This dynamic traps Eleanor in a cycle of desire she can never fulfilled. The desire for normalcy reveals how Eleanor views herself as fundamentally flawed. Especially in relation to the social symbolic order. Her obsessive efforts to disguise herself into a normal woman reveal her self-perception. It is entirely defined by the demands of the Other.

The desire for love reveals how Eleanor projects wholeness onto an imaginary object. The singer whom she constructs in her mind is an objet petit a. She believes this figure can solve her lack. Eleanor's attachment to the singer is in the fantasy. This fantasy protects her from real emotional risks. It also permanently traps her desire in an unattainable fantasy. The desire for absolution reveals the most painful aspect of Eleanor's self-perception. Her belief that she is stained by her mother's sins and responsible for the death of her sister, Marianne. Eleanor's desire constructs a self-punishing fantasy with suffering is the only valid form of existence. This guilt works as an anchor preventing her from moving forward. Releasing it would mean facing the full weight of her traumatic past.

Related to the second research question, this study found that Eleanor's unfulfilled desires expose the illusion of wholeness she has constructed to survive through three interconnected stages rooted in Lacanian psychoanalytic framework. First, lack reveals the structural gap that Eleanor's desires could never fill, her desire for maternal approval, normalcy, romantic love, and absolution all point to an absence that no object or relationship could close. The existence of this lack is evidenced not through Eleanor's acknowledgement but through her persistent denial of it, which itself proves that something fundamental was always missing. Second, fantasy exposes the illusion of wholeness from within, Eleanor constructs narratives of independence, romantic salvation, maternal connection, and self-repair precisely because lack is too painful to confront directly.

However, the very existence of these fantasies betrays the illusion, because a subject who is truly whole does not need to construct scenarios of wholeness to sustain herself. Third, Eleanor's condition as a split subject becomes undeniable when fantasy can no longer conceal the gap between what she claims about herself and what her desire reveals. She has always known her mother was wrong, always known her life was not fine, always known her romantic fantasy was a fairy tale, and always known the past could not be undone. It is through the exposure of this split that the illusion of wholeness collapses entirely from the structural workings of Eleanor's own desire.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that Eleanor's unfulfilled desires are symptoms of a subjectivity shaped by the structural lack in the Lacanian

framework. Through Lacan (2014), it becomes clear that Eleanor's journey is not about achieving wholeness. It is about learning to live honestly with her incompleteness. The analysis further reveals that these unfulfilled desires do not simply reflect what Eleanor lacks, but actively expose the illusion of wholeness she has constructed to survive through the interplay of lack, fantasy, and the condition of the split subject. It becomes evident that the wholeness Eleanor pursued was never a real state she could reach. But a structural impossibility that her own desire was always in the process of uncovering.

B. Suggestion

This research of the novel *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine* opens up various opportunities for further research and reflection. This research focuses on the protagonist's unfulfilled desire through the framework of Lacan (2018). Future research could explore other dimensions. For example, researchers can examine how unfulfilled desires in contemporary literature reflect a broader crisis of subjectivity in modern society. They can also explore how unfulfilled desires expose the illusion of wholeness experienced by main character in fiction. This novel also offers a unique lens for exploring the role of supporting characters. This includes Raymond, who is a catalyst for the protagonist's recovery and a representation of a healthy "Other". This aspect was limited in this study. These findings could open up the way for interdisciplinary research. It could involve psychology, gender studies, or even family sociology. The research could focus on how interpersonal relationships can support the recovery of a fragmented identity.

Another direction is Eleanor's journey with other literary figures who experienced similar trauma in different cultural contexts. Cross-novel or cross-cultural analysis can highlight the universal aspects of lack and desire within a Lacanian framework. It also providing insight into how literary works reflect the psychological state of human beings in a variety of social contexts. This research centers on an individual's emotional journey. Further research can expand its scope to explore more collective psychological themes. It could be dysfunctional family dynamics, the generational impact of violence, or the role of society in trauma recovery. It is hoped that this research can be a starting point for further exploration of literature as a mirror of human psychology. It also a bridge to understand personal and collective well-being.

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